

# Matter of Fact . . . . . By Stewart Alsop

## The Dulles White Paper II

EXHIBIT A in the forthcoming inquiry into American policy in the Middle East ought to be a new book about Secretary of State John Foster Dulles by John Robinson Beal of Time magazine.



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The book contains a long and passionate defense of the Dulles Middle Eastern policies, and according to the author it "benefits from personal interviews with (Dulles) which have provided insight into his official actions." In short, it is a kind of white paper, or lawyer's brief, for the Dulles policies, based on facts and interpretations supplied in large part by Dulles himself.

As such it is a fascinating document. A previous report has described how Beal reveals that Dulles consciously brought on the Middle Eastern crisis by withdrawing the American offer to aid in building the Aswan Dam in the most brutal and insulting way possible. The rest of the book is designed to prove that, in thus forcing a Middle Eastern showdown, Dulles brought off successfully "a truly major gambit in the cold war," greatly to the benefit of the United States.

Because of the evident authority with which Beal writes, this thesis deserves further scrutiny. The Beal, or perhaps Dulles-Beal, version of the crisis may be summarized as follows:

Egypt's Colonel Nasser reacted violently to the calculated slap in the face, as

Dulles had expected. He nationalized the Suez Canal, and thus "precipitated the sharpest crisis the western powers had faced in the Middle East, and before it was over produced a tremendously shocking split among the western powers themselves."

THE SPLIT occurred because the British, after much "wavering," joined the French in a "plot which the French had already cooked up with the Israeli." In so doing, Dulles' opposite number, British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd, consciously "misled" the American government. The "Israeli-French-British plot to seize the canal" made President Eisenhower "angry clear through." Throughout the crisis, however, Dulles followed a "consistent and purposeful" policy.

Facing a weak and misguided neutral, Dulles believed that the best course was to swing moral opinion to bear on him and show him, if possible, in what way he was misguided. Despite British-French rejection of this theory, the Dulles method prevailed in the end. The Dulles method prevailed because he "wielded the influence of the United States so vigorously that fighting was stopped within a week. This was 'waging peace' with genuine skill."

Thus the end result of the Dulles-forced Middle Eastern showdown was a big net plus for the United States. It created "a completely new understanding of motives in 'neutral' parts of the world, which added immensely to the stature of the United States as moral leader in the fight for peace."

This is a remarkably hopeful version of the crisis, but

there appear to be a couple of gaps in it. In the first place, the British decision to join the "plot" may have been an act of folly, but it was not an act of insanity. The British became convinced, with reason, that the Dulles policy, however "moral" and "consistent and purposeful," would not prevent the violently hostile Nasser from gaining total control of the canal—a prospect they regarded, also with reason, as intolerable.

The intolerable prospect is now a reality. From here on out, the western Europeans will have to get used to the unhappy feeling of Nasser's knife at their economic throats. If Nasser has been shown "in what way he was misguided," he gives no sign of it. Indeed, from his point of view, his policy has not been misguided at all, but triumphantly successful.

MOREOVER, the Beal brief for Dulles leaves the real key question unanswered. Why was the "influence of the United States" wielded in such a way that Nasser was relieved of all pressure from Britain, France, and Israel, while at the same time no American influence of any sort was brought to bear on Nasser for a commitment on the canal or anything else?

Give Secretary Dulles all due credit for energy and perspicacity, and our allies all due blame for folly. Until the key question is answered, it will be hard to accept the theory that Dulles' decision to force a Middle Eastern showdown was really quite the brilliant diplomatic gambit his biographer claims for him.

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